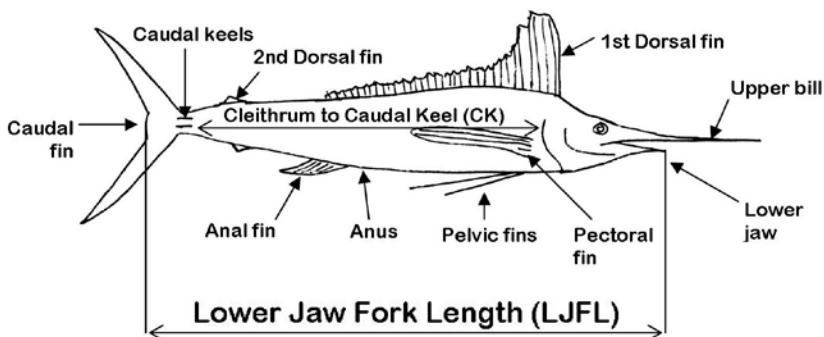
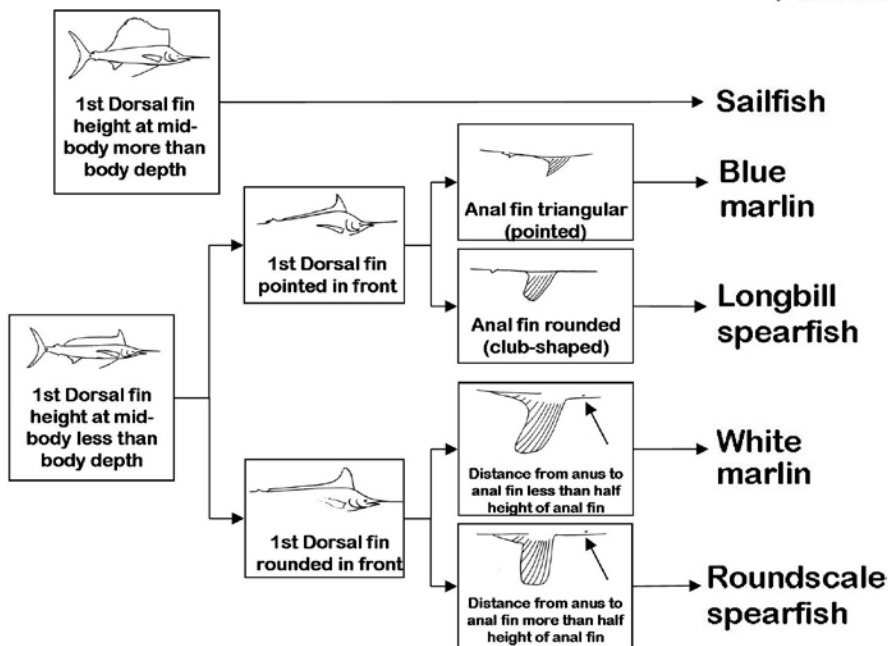


IV. BILLFISHES

ANATOMY AND MEASUREMENT OF ATLANTIC BILLFISHES



IDENTIFICATION OF ATLANTIC BILLFISHES



AUTHORIZED SPECIES¹⁹

Blue marlin | White marlin | Roundscale spearfish | Sailfish

PROHIBITED SPECIES²⁰

Longbill spearfish

PERMITS AND GEARS

Permits	Gear ²¹
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. HMS Angling,²² OR2. HMS Charter/Headboat,²³ OR3. Atlantic Tunas General category²⁴, OR Swordfish General Commercial²⁵ ONLY if participating in a registered Atlantic HMS tournament.	Rod and reel

Billfish tournament anglers fishing with natural bait (or natural/artificial bait combination) must use non-offset circle hooks. J-hooks and offset circle hooks may only be used with artificial lures.²⁶

SIZE/BAG LIMITS AND SEASONS

Species	Minimum Size (LJFL) ²⁷	Bag Limit	Season
Blue marlin	99"	None*	Jan. 1 - Dec. 31
Sailfish	63"		
White marlin	66"		
Roundscale spearfish	66"		

* There is an annual U.S. landings limit of 250 Atlantic blue marlin, white marlin, and roundscale spearfish (combined). Landings updates and seasonal closures are posted at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/species/billfish>.²⁸

LANDING RESTRICTIONS²⁹

Billfish may be gutted at sea, but must be landed whole with head, fins, and bill intact.

NOAA Fisheries strongly encourages the live release of billfishes.

An Atlantic billfish that is caught but not kept must be released immediately to improve its chances of survival without removing it from the water.³⁰

Some tips for safe handling and release of billfishes: <http://go.usa.gov/3YYHV>

1. Do not remove the fish from the water, even for a picture.
2. Use circle hooks and dehooking devices that hook the fish in the jaw or corner of the mouth, making it easier to remove the hook and less harmful to the fish.
3. Use heavier tackle to reduce the fight time so the fish isn't exhausted and depleted of energy, which could add stress and contribute to death.



A vessel that has been issued an Atlantic Tunas General category or Swordfish General Commercial permit may use that permit to fish recreationally for Atlantic billfish during a registered Atlantic HMS tournament. HMS Angling category regulations for Atlantic billfish apply, including those addressing authorized gears, techniques, and size limits for billfish caught under either permit.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS³¹

- Anglers must report all recreational billfish landings.
 - Anglers in Maryland and North Carolina must report at a state-operated reporting station (state contact information is in Section XI).
 - All other anglers must report to NMFS within 24 hours either online at <https://hmspermits.noaa.gov>, or by calling (800) 894-5528.
 - If the angler enters (reports) a billfish in a registered HMS tournament, the tournament operator must report that fish. A list of registered tournaments is available at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/compliance/tournaments/index.html>
- The Large Pelagic Survey (LPS) or Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP, formerly MRFSS) may survey anglers at the dock or by phone.³² If contacted, anglers are required to participate in these surveys; however, participation does not fulfill reporting obligations and vessel owners/operators must still report all billfish as described above.

RESTRICTED AREAS³³

- Tortugas Marine Reserves (closed year-round)
- Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps closed areas (closed year-round except for surface trolling allowed May-October)
- Edges 40 Fathom Contour closed area (closed January-April)

